

Kentucky Department of Education

Jefferson County Public Schools Alternative Leadership Assessment Team Report

April 5, 2012

I. Organization

Jefferson County Public Schools has several schools that have been identified as persistently low-achieving and is, therefore, required by statute and the Kentucky Board of Education to undergo a District Leadership Assessment. Unrelated to this process, JCPS contracted with Phi Delta Kappa (PDK), a nationally recognized professional educational research organization, to conduct a curriculum management audit that was carried out in the fall of 2011. The management audit is an intensive, independent examination of the curriculum design and delivery system of the schools and district. The audit examined the extent to which the school district:

1. demonstrates its control of resources, programs and personnel;
2. has established clear and valid objectives for students;
3. demonstrates internal consistency and rational equity in its program development and implementation;
4. uses the results from district designed or adopted assessments to adjust, improve or terminate ineffective practices or programs; and
5. has improved productivity.

As an integral part of this process, the management audit examined the quality of district curriculum development and instructional practice, professional development and other support systems as well as monitoring, supervision and evaluation practices. The audit team used documents, interviews, and site observations as major sources of data to determine the extent to which there is congruence among the written, taught, and tested curricula. The process used to conduct the PDK Curriculum Audit closely parallels the Kentucky Leadership Assessment process and the AdvancED/Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation process. Accordingly, the Jefferson County leadership and board sought approval from the Kentucky Board of Education to waive the Leadership Assessment requirement citing that two such similar reports in close proximity could be redundant and an unnecessary burden on the school system.

The Jefferson County Board of Education's request for a waiver of specific requirements relative to the district leadership assessment outlined in 703 KAR 5:180 was approved by the Kentucky Board of Education at their April 4 meeting.

II. Process

The Kentucky Department of Education empanelled a Leadership Assessment Team comprised of representatives from KDE and AdvancED/SACS Kentucky as well as trained Leadership Assessment team leads and members. Team members were as follows:

1. Margaret Cleveland (Parent), KDE Leadership Assessment Team Member
2. Jerry Cooper, AdvancED Kentucky Associate Director
3. Floyd Hines, KDE Leadership Assessment Team Member
4. Dr. Janet Hurt, KDE Leadership Assessment Team Lead
5. Mike Hurt, KDE Leadership Assessment Team Lead
6. Thomas Jones, AdvancED Kentucky State Director, Jefferson Co. Team Co-Chair

7. Julia Rawlings, KDE Educational Recovery Leader, Division of Student Success
8. Dr. Fred Simpson, KDE Leadership Assessment Team Lead, Jefferson Co. Team Co-Chair
9. Carolyn Spangler, KDE, Educational Recovery Leader, Division of Student Success
10. Dr. Larry Stinson, KDE Associate Commissioner, Office of Next Generation Schools and Districts
11. Donna Tackett, KDE, Director, Division of Consolidated Plans and Audits

The team examined and discussed documents pertinent to this process including all sections of the PDK Curriculum Audit Report, the Jefferson County “crosswalk” or analysis documents and the School Leadership Assessment reports from Jefferson County for the current year. These documents were analyzed in the context of their alignment to the Kentucky Department of Education Standards and Indicators for School Improvement as well as the 2012 AdvancED/SACS Standards for Quality School Systems. The process yielded findings including commendations, recommendations, and additional comments, which do not reflect any actions, changes or improvements that may have occurred in Jefferson County since the PDK Audit was conducted in the fall of 2011.

III. Findings

The Jefferson County Leadership Assessment Team finds that the PDK Curriculum Audit generally aligns with both the KDE Standards and Indicators for School Improvement (SISI) and the 2012 AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems. The Team further finds that the PDK Report analysis and “crosswalk” documents provided by Jefferson County Schools appropriately address the critical issues identified in the KDE 2011 School Leadership Assessment reports.

In addition to the above determinations, the Team offers the following commendations, recommendations and additional comments. Commendations identify practices or conditions addressed in the PDK report that the team finds particularly noteworthy. Recommendations identify improvement needs revealed through the 2011 Leadership Assessments that were not fully addressed through the PDK Audit. The team has determined these recommendations, which are aligned to SISI and AdvancED standards, are crucial to sustained improvement of student performance and district/school effectiveness. Additional comments are observations, considerations and opportunities for improvement that emerged from the discussion and analysis of the pertinent documents that, while worthy of consideration, do not rise to the level of recommendation.

Commendations

1. The decision by the Jefferson County Board of Education to dedicate substantial resources to conduct the PDK Curriculum Audit over a year ago demonstrates a significant commitment to systemic improvement in student performance and organizational effectiveness.
2. District leadership collects, maintains, analyzes and communicates an abundance of qualitative and quantitative data which is intended to help drive improvement in student performance and system and school effectiveness.
3. The 2011 KDE School Leadership Assessment reports as well as the PDK Curriculum Audit consistently reveal the existence of abundant human and material resources intended to support the purpose and direction of the school system.
4. School and district leadership have developed an extensive network of community and business partnerships and collaborations to help remove barriers to learning that exist throughout the community and particularly in Persistently Low Achieving schools.

Recommendations

1. Create, implement and sustain a collaborative process that will use data from multiple assessments and an ongoing examination of professional practice to systematically and collaboratively monitor and adjust curriculum, instruction, and assessment to ensure vertical and horizontal alignment across the district.
 - a. Ensure that analysis of data, monitoring and adjustment of instructional and assessment practice regularly occurs within and among schools.
 - b. Ensure that like courses/classes have the same high learning expectations throughout the system.
2. Create a collaborative process to ensure that links between the curriculum and continuing education, life and career options are rigorous and appropriately relevant for all students. Examine opportunities to meaningfully engage community stakeholders in this collaboration.
3. Commit to shaping and sustaining a school, system and community culture in which all stakeholders are collectively accountable for maintaining and improving conditions that support student learning. Central to creating this culture are:
 - a. establishing the belief among all stakeholders that all students can learn at high levels;
 - b. ensuring that high student behavioral and academic expectations (e.g., attendance, conduct, safety, learning) are consistently established in all schools.
4. Ensure that specific programs designed to engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education are implemented and evaluated at the system level and in all schools.

Additional Comments

1. As stated in the Commendations section, the district collects, maintains, analyzes and communicates an abundance of quality data about students and schools. A discussion about this strength occurred in light of information contained in some of the 2011 Leadership Assessment reports. Team members observed that sometimes the sheer amount of data provided to schools may overwhelm their ability to use it in shaping decisions. Consider creating a categorization system of data around district improvement priorities (e.g., Essential, Supportive, Available upon Request) which could filter how the data are perceived and used at the school level. The communication of the data could then be tailored to their type and intended use.
2. There is an active, intentional and systematic involvement of community businesses and agencies in Jefferson County, both at the district and school levels, in support of student learning. The Leadership Assessment teams observed that the education and involvement of parents and other family members is not as well developed or as systematic at the school level and remains a significant barrier to student learning. As the district continues to wrestle with its student assignment, feeder and transportation concerns, this issue should remain at the forefront of considerations. Parent and family involvement is essential to the creation of a culture of high expectations for all students throughout the district.
3. Several school Leadership Assessment teams observed that the connection between rigorous and relevant instruction and student behavior is not yet embedded in the culture of many schools. The school approach to establishing a well-disciplined environment must include the teaching of appropriate behavior to students in addition to the imposition of rewards or sanctions. The challenges of working with large numbers of students who exhibit high risk behaviors and attitudes have often led to the imposition of rigid behavioral systems

and to the use of teacher centered pedagogies to ensure that an orderly environment is maintained. This inhibits the ability of teachers to use student engagement strategies to reduce student misbehavior and to enhance the level of learning. Opportunities for students to become active participants in learning activities (e.g., collaborative learning, laboratory experiences, discussion) are, therefore, limited. Students become recipients of information rather than active learners and often become disengaged from or discouraged about their learning, which can help to create the very misbehavior the classroom management systems were designed to avoid.

IV. Determinations

- The Leadership Assessment Team has determined that the Jefferson County Public Schools have the capacity and capability to provide leadership to support Persistently Low Achieving Schools.

V. Conclusion

The Leadership Assessment Team appreciates the openness of the Jefferson County Public Schools to this process. The information received from the district demonstrated careful analysis of the PDK report and a thoughtful connection to district and school improvement priorities. This openness is further demonstrated by board and district leadership having already begun work on application of many of the recommendations of the report to the work of the system and schools. It is our hope that the district will continue to feel compelled to use the information provided in the PDK report, the School Leadership Assessment reports and this District Leadership Assessment report as resources to reflect deeply on the challenges that still face them, with broad and systematic participation of all stakeholder groups from all parts of the community.